

Proposed Action and Purpose and Need Hat Creek Recreation Enhancements Project

**U.S. Forest Service
Lassen National Forest
Hat Creek Ranger District
Shasta County, California**

BACKGROUND

The Hat Creek Ranger District is starting analysis on the Hat Creek Recreation Enhancements Project located in existing recreation sites in the Hat Creek corridor south of the town of Hat Creek and north of Lassen Volcanic National Park near highways 44 and 89. Recreation areas occur from Township 34 N, south to Township 31 N, and from Range 3 East, west to Range 5 E, Mount Diablo Base and Meridian. See figure 1 for a map of the recreation sites.

MANAGEMENT DIRECTION

The proposed action is guided by the 1992 Lassen National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) and 1993 Record of Decision (ROD), as amended by the Sierra Nevada Forest Plan (SNFP) Amendment FEIS and ROD, and the SNFP Management Indicator Species Amendment. The project is located in the Hat Creek, Lost Creek, and Logan Management Areas under the Lassen LRMP.

The Hat Creek Recreation Enhancements Project is designed to be consistent with the National Forest Management Act (16 U.S.C. 1600), National Environmental Policy Act (36 CFR 220), National Historic Preservation Act (16 U.S.C. 470), Endangered Species Act (16 U.S.C. 1531), Clean Water Act (33 U.S.C. 1351), Clean Air Act (42 U.S.C. 7401), and the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (42 U.S.C. 6901 et seq.).

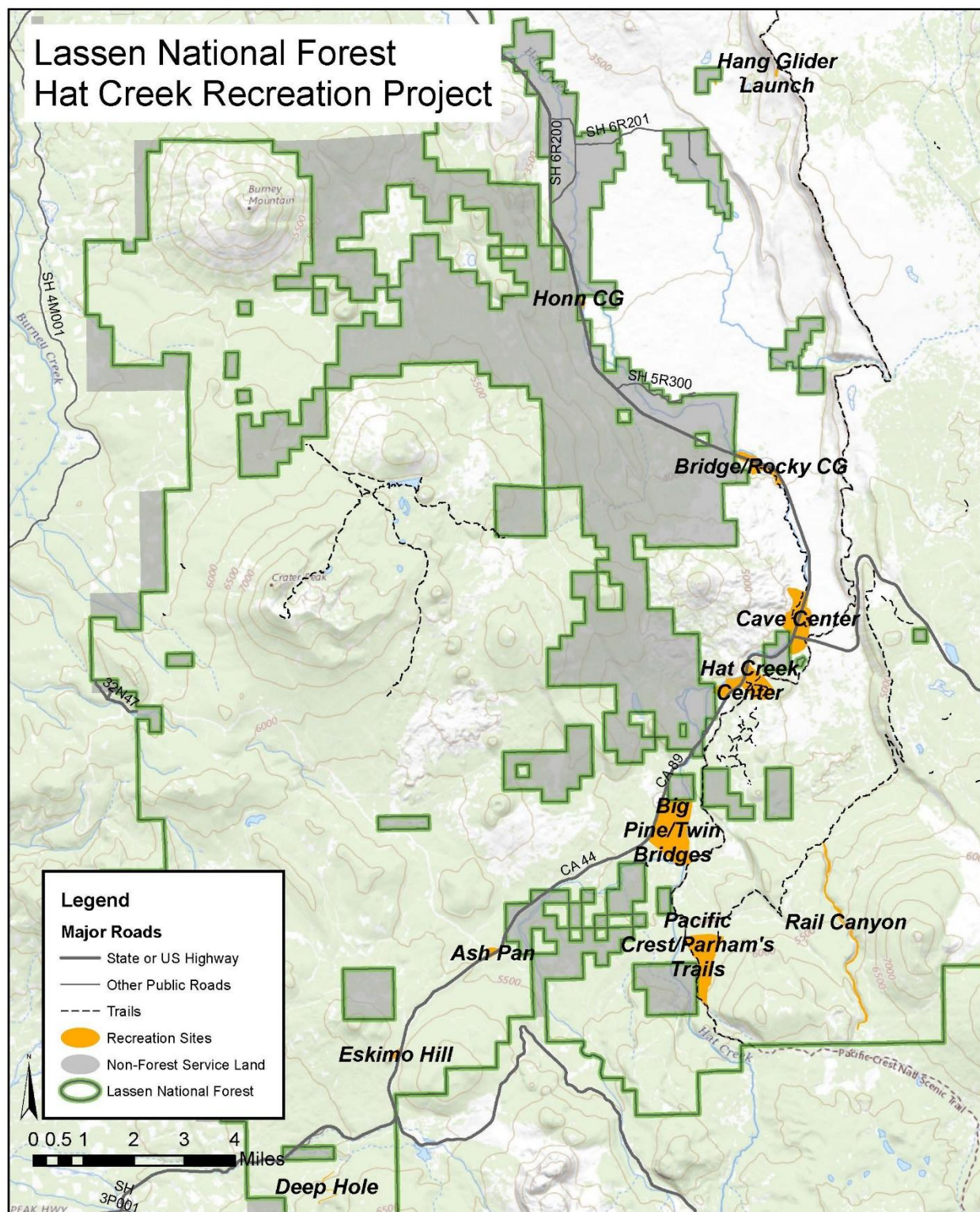


Figure 1. Map of the Hat Creek Recreation Enhancement Project sites.

The Hat Creek Ranger District has made a preliminary assessment that this proposed project may fall under one or more Categorical Exclusion (CE) categories listed under 36 CFR 220.6(e)(1, 21-24). Projects planned under these CE categories are designed to address deferred maintenance and facilitate improvements in existing recreation and administrative sites, including realigning or reconstructing roads and parking areas associated with these sites. We anticipate that a Decision Memo documenting the analysis and effects will be prepared, but the Deciding Official will determine the level of analysis in accordance with issues raised in scoping.

PURPOSE AND NEED

The purpose of the Hat Creek Recreation Enhancements Project is to create environmentally and economically sustainable recreation opportunities that protect forest and watershed resources and meet public needs within the Hat Creek recreation corridor between Lassen Volcanic National Park and the town of Hat Creek. The actions within this project are intended to:

- Enhance outdoor recreation opportunities to meet public need and demand by improving safety, access, and services, and by updating and expanding facilities in existing recreation areas.
- Manage recreation uses to protect forest and watershed resources, provide safe and sustainable access to riparian areas, and reduce user conflicts.
- Enhance and sustain recreation and economic benefits to the local communities.
- Remediate areas that have existing user-related damage.

Existing Condition

The Hat Creek Recreation Area was developed in 1964. Since that time, visitation has increased dramatically, and visitor demographics have expanded to include extended family units and people with disabilities. Sports, equipment, and recreational activities have also changed. In addition to the traditional outdoor sports such as hunting, fishing, and hiking, there are new activities such as off-highway vehicles (OHV), equestrian riding, mountain biking, caving, paragliding, hang gliding, and winter sports.

Most of the facilities were designed and built in the 1960s and no longer accommodate the number of visitors or modern recreational vehicles. Campgrounds cannot accommodate the larger equipment, sites are not universally designed, and parking is inadequate and unsafe. Many visitors are turning to dispersed camping for the larger recreational vehicles that would be better accommodated in developed campgrounds. User conflicts and environmental impacts from unmanaged dispersed recreation are

readily apparent, especially within riparian areas. In addition, new trails, facilities, and interpretation is desired to enhance the recreation experience and expand recreation opportunities, especially for visitors with reduced mobility.

Cave Campground, one of the most popular areas on the district, is adjacent to Subway Cave and the village of Old Station. The developed campground currently only accommodates tent camping, so RVs use adjacent uncontrolled dispersed camping for access to campground and village amenities. Dispersed camping is also uncontrolled and excessive at the Hang Glider Area and Twin Bridges. Many other campgrounds and day use areas need additional sites and reconfigured or expanded parking areas to improve safety and reduce impacts when they become crowded.

Desired Condition

The desired condition for the recreation corridor is to have updated facilities that can accommodate visitors with all types of needs and equipment. Facilities would be designed to meet current visitor demographics. They would be situated such that they protect soil and water resources, provide access to popular attractions, compliment the recreation opportunities they support, and contribute to economic sustainability for the Hat Creek District recreation program, local businesses, and the community.

Need for Action

There is a need to:

1. Address known safety issues
2. Protect natural resources from user impacts and remediate existing damage
3. Expand access for visitors with reduced mobility
4. Reduce conflicts between different types of recreationists (e.g., equestrian and OHV)
5. Enhance recreation opportunities and upgrade facilities to modern standards

PROPOSED ACTION

Specific activities proposed are listed for each recreation area or trail below. Larger scale maps showing the approximate treatment areas and schematic drawings for each area are available on the project website:

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=60492>. (The treatment polygons are deliberately larger than the actual area where treatment will occur and exceed the full extent of planned disturbance. They are primarily intended to display the location of the action.)

Infrastructure Improvements in Existing Administrative or Recreation Sites under CEs 21 and 22; road and parking area management or construction and realignment under CEs 23, and 24.

Northern Center

Hat Creek Hang Glider Area

1. Construct small group campsite (dry camp) adding
 - a. Group fire pit/BBQ area
 - b. Tables
 - c. Vault toilet
 - d. Create designated spectator area with interpretive signage
1. Construct fence or barriers to limit dispersed camping in the meadow
2. Add a vault toilet in the launch area
3. Control star thistle, especially in the launch area, using an integrated pest management approach, including the use of herbicides

Honn Campground

1. Reconfigure and expand camping sites
 - a. Establish small group site on south end
 - b. Add screening from highway
2. Expand and improve parking
3. Add accessible camp site and access trails
4. Add accessible fishing platforms and boardwalk
5. If needed to prevent bank damage, place boulders to prevent vehicles from going too close.
6. Implement erosion prevention and/or bank stabilization measures as necessary

Bridge Campground

1. Level and reconfigure camping sites, expand as feasible
2. Expand parking area
3. Construct accessible camping sites
4. Upgrade restrooms and other amenities

5. If needed to prevent bank damage, place boulders to prevent vehicles from going too close.
6. Implement erosion prevention and/or bank stabilization measures as necessary

Bridge Day Use Area

1. Expand on north side
2. Reconfigure road, parking, and picnic sites
3. Add second entrance to allow one-way traffic flow
4. Add accessible picnic and fishing areas
5. If needed to prevent bank damage, place boulders to prevent vehicles from going too close.
6. Implement erosion prevention and/or bank stabilization measures as necessary

Rocky Campground

1. Level and reconfigure camping and day use sites
2. Expand turnaround and add day use parking
3. Add accessible camping and day use site
4. Upgrade restroom and amenities
5. Upgrade bridge encroachments
6. Implementation of erosion prevention measures as required.
7. If deemed necessary, construct an additional path down to stream.

Subway Cave Center

Subway Cave Geological Area

1. Improve stairways
2. Upgrade lava tube trail and Pacific Crest Trail connector for accessibility
3. Construct accessible interpretive area at lava tube exit
4. Add phone lines, power, and security lights
5. Construct visitor services entrance building at cave entrance
6. Construct new parking area and pedestrian access trails
7. Add restrooms and accessible picnic sites

8. Improve and add security gates

Cave Campground

1. Upgrade electric, water, and septic systems
2. Level and reconfigure camping sites
3. Relocate and upgrade restrooms; add showers
4. Construct accessible and host camping sites
5. Construct accessible fishing platforms and access trails
6. Upgrade footbridge encroachments
7. Build amphitheater and trail in north camping loop
8. Reconfigure and expand day use parking areas
9. Implement erosion prevention and/or bank stabilization measures as necessary

Cave RV Campground

1. Improve the existing road on west side of Hat Creek to better accommodate RVs
2. Develop RV camping sites west of Hat Creek
 - a. Expand electric, water, and septic systems
 - b. Add restrooms, RV hook-ups, and a host site
 - c. Add entrance and fee station
3. Remediate existing watershed damage, including:
 - a. Exposed, compacted, and/or displaced soil
 - b. Erosional damage
 - c. Stabilization of areas in which bank integrity is insufficient to prevent sedimentation of channel.
 - d. Upgrading of existing boulder lines and placement of new ones as necessary.

Sugarloaf Day Use Area

1. Improve existing day use area
2. Reconfigure parking
3. Add restrooms
4. Add interpretive and picnic area with shade
5. Remediate existing watershed damage, as described under *Cave RV Campground*

Hat Creek Fishermen's Trail

1. Add accessible fishing platforms and parking at access points
2. Improve erosion control and protect banks
3. Improve encroachments on existing bridges
4. Replace footbridge near gaging station
5. Remediate existing watershed damage, as described under *Cave RV Campground*

Old Station Visitor's Center

1. Upgrade and expand parking
2. Upgrade service road to amphitheater
3. Construct pavilion and add vault toilet at amphitheater
4. Add storage building for landscaping and other equipment

Old Station RV Dump Station

1. Expand pavement on eastside entrance for dumpsters and parking
2. Build dumpster pens
3. Upgrade potable water station
4. Upgrade signage
5. Add a metered shower unit

Hat Creek Center

Hat Creek Campground

1. Upgrade electric, water, and septic systems
2. Upgrade restrooms and add showers
3. Expand and connect spurs for RVs; including pull-through sites (approximately 32 sites)
4. Construct accessible camping sites and access trails
5. Expand parking areas
6. Construct small picnic area at footbridge
7. Add a shade pavilion
8. Construct accessible fishing areas

9. Add fish cleaning station
10. Add infrastructure for cellular service (as feasible)
11. Implement erosion prevention and/or bank stabilization measures as necessary

Hat Creek Group Campground

1. Add power and septic to group host site
2. Replace fencing or boulders around loops
3. Replace and upgrade vault toilets
4. Add fire pits, food lockers, picnic tables and group barbeque area
5. Implement erosion prevention and/or bank stabilization measures as necessary

Old Station Picnic Area

1. Expand parking and turnaround area
2. Improve accessible trail
3. Construct accessible fishing platform
4. Implement erosion prevention and/or bank stabilization measures as necessary

Spatter Cones Trailhead and Trail

1. Improve and expand parking
2. Add tables and shade structures as necessary
3. Install safety grate over “blow hole”
4. Upgrade fixtures
5. Install donation tube
6. Improve and reconstruct trail

Big Pine/Twin Bridges

Big Pine Campground

1. Level and reconfigure existing camping sites
2. Add accessible camping sites
3. Upgrade and add access trails
4. Add fencing to protect streambank and riparian area

5. Add two additional RV loops (~32 sites)
 - a. Restrooms and trash receptacles
 - b. Trail to day use area
6. Stabilize stream bank to prevent it being further eroded away. This may include:
 - a. Placement of erosion control fabric.
 - b. Planting of willows or other native riparian vegetation.
 - c. Placement of stones, wood, or other material in the stream to direct flow away from the areas being actively eroded.
 - d. As a last resort, armoring the bank with stones.
7. Remediate areas of exposed, bare soil. This could be done via:
 - a. Erosion control fabric
 - b. Planting of native vegetation
 - c. Placing of mulch for short-term protection
 - d. Placement of signage
 - e. Temporarily blocking access until the remediation activities in an area have been completed

Big Pine Day Use Area

1. Picnic area with universal access adjacent to new RV loops
2. Construct accessible fishing platform(s)
3. Add restrooms and trash receptacles
4. Add interpretive area
5. Stabilize bank and remediate bare soil, as discussed under *Big Pine Campground*.
6. Placing boulders in the 36-48" size class where necessary to prevent further OHV and vehicle-based damage. Spacing would be approximately 24-30"

Twin Bridges

1. Block and remediate user-created roads/vehicular tracks that lead into the riparian zone with boulders (as described above) or fencing.
2. Stabilize banks and remediate bare spots, using techniques described under Big Pine Campground.

Twin Bridges Equestrian Camp

1. Delineate sites in dispersed camping area
2. Add vault toilets
3. Upgrade corrals consistent with historical status
4. Designate for equestrian use
5. Add fencing to prevent site expansion and discourage OHV trespass
6. Place exclusion bouldering as needed
7. Implement erosion prevention and/or bank stabilization measures as necessary

Eskimo Hill Center

Eskimo Hill

1. Re-engineer/construct sled hill
2. Fill depression
3. Lengthen run-out
4. Create children's play areas
5. Designate spectator areas
6. Regrade and expand parking areas
7. Consider second highway encroachment over turnaround
8. Add entrance/fee area/concession buildings
9. Install security fencing

Ashpan Snowmobile Staging Area

1. Pave access road and parking areas
2. Add picnic area and access trail
3. Install security system
4. Upgrade and add vault toilets

Deep Hole Geologic Special Interest Area

1. Improve 31N48 road coming from the north; keep road as maintenance level 2
2. Establish 2-3 car parking area (turn out)

3. Clear manzanita brush near crater
 - a. Masticate, pile & burn
4. Construct trail (~200 ft) to crater overlook/interpretive area
5. Construct an observation deck with interpretive signs

Trail Construction or Reconstruction under CE 1

Rail Canyon Hiking Trail

1. Construct approximately 4 miles of hiking trail from 32N12 to Parham's Trail
2. Add interpretive signage

Pacific Crest Trail/Parham's Trail Relocation

1. Upgrade and reconstruct approximately 13 miles of Parham's Trail
2. Construct connector trail with Pacific Crest Trail
3. Block abandoned sections of current PCT
4. Intensive maintenance and trail reconstruction in the Twin Bridges area

Connected and Miscellaneous Actions

Vegetation Management in Existing Administration and Recreation Sites

Activities to mitigate hazards and maintain forest health implemented as needed:

1. Trees with insect infestation or disease would be removed as necessary to maintain forest health.
2. Trees and shrubs may be removed to facilitate construction and ensure public and employee safety.
 - a. Merchantable timber may be sold as saw-logs or used on-site for barriers, depending on needs and market conditions at the time.
 - b. Non-merchantable material may be sold as biomass, offered as firewood, or piled and burned.
3. Trees and shrubs may be planted to reforest insect and diseases areas, or to provide aesthetic or privacy screening.
4. Herbicide treatments will be used to control non-native invasive plants where needed in developed recreation areas (campgrounds and day use areas). Integrated Pest Management would be combined with early detection and rapid response. Herbicides would include aminopyralid and glyphosate.

All the above activities are authorized by 36 CFR 220.6(d)(5) (decision memo and case file not required)

NEXT STEPS

Deciding Official

The Deciding Official for the Hat Creek Recreation Enhancements Project is Robin Wall, District Ranger for the Hat Creek Ranger District.

How to Provide Scoping Comments

The Hat Creek Ranger District is seeking your input as it relates to the proposed action and identification of any issues about the anticipated effects from this proposed action. Interested persons, state and local governments, and tribes are encouraged to participate now and throughout the development of this project. Please respond by October 4, 2021 so your comments may be fully considered as we move through the decision-making (“NEPA”) process with this project.

Comments, written or oral, may be submitted to: Robin Wall, District Ranger, Hat Creek Ranger District, PO Box 220, Fall River Mills, CA 96028, (530) 336-5521, FAX: (530)336-3338, during normal business hours. Hat Creek Ranger District Office’s business hours are from 8 am to 4:30 pm, Monday through Friday.

Electronic comments, in acceptable plain text (.txt), rich text (.rtf), or Word (.doc) formats, may be submitted to: comments-pacificsouthwest-lassen-hat-creek@usda.gov using Subject: Hat Creek Recreation Enhancement Project.

Comments received, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be part of the project record and available for public review.

Projects that are categorically excluded are not subject to pre-decisional administrative review or administrative appeal. Further, they are not subject to legal notice and comment under the pre-decisional administrative review process (36 CFR 218.23).